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Iraq: Reports of attacks against Kurds in northern Iraq (January 2006 - October 2006)

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Background

Media reports from 2006 state that sectarian violence has been prevalent in northern Iraq due primarily to tensions between Arab and Kurdish populations (AP 8 Oct. 2006; *The Los Angeles Times* 20 July 2006; Reuters 19 Oct. 2006). Prior to the fall of Saddam Hussein, a policy of Arabization existed whereby Kurdish villages, located primarily in the north, were destroyed, and Kurdish people were either killed or forced to relocate to other parts of Iraq so that Arabs could populate the region (AFP 19 Oct. 2006; *MERIA* Dec. 2002; BBC 20 Sept. 2006). Since Saddam Hussein was ousted in 2003, Kurds have been returning to their homes, in particular in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk (AFP 19 Oct. 2006; AP 8 Oct. 2006; ICG 18 July 2006). Ethnic groups in Kirkuk include Kurds, Sunni Arabs, Turkomen, Shiites and Assyrian Chaldeans (ibid.; AFP 30 July 2006). A referendum is to be held before the end of 2007 in order to determine whether Kirkuk will become part of Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdish region of northern Iraq (*The Los Angeles Times* 20 July 2006; ICG 18 July 2006). Non-Kurdish ethnic groups in Kirkuk are opposed to making the city a part of the Kurdish region (ibid.; AFP 19 Oct. 2006), as such action is perceived as a bid for Kurdish dominance over the region and its oil resources (ICG 18 July 2006).

Violence in Kirkuk and Mosul

According to media sources, Kirkuk has been the target of several bombings and attacks in 2006 (AFP 19 Oct. 2006), particularly since June (ibid. 30 July 2006; *The Los Angeles Times* 20 July 2006). On 23 June 2006, 22 people were killed when a bomb was detonated in front of a Kirkuk courthouse (AFP 30 July 2006). The Associated Press (AP) reports that, in September 2006, there were 16 car bomb attacks in Kirkuk (8 Oct. 2006). The Associated Press also states that the attacks in Kirkuk are "largely blamed on Sunni Arab insurgents targeting Kurds and the Kurdish-dominated police force" (8 Oct. 2006). *The Los Angeles Times* corroborates this information and reports that Turkomen and Kurdish politicians and their families have also been targeted (20 July 2006). In addition, a major with United States Army Intelligence noted in a 2 February 2006 interview on National Public Radio (NPR) that flyers had been distributed in Kirkuk urging the Turkomen population to "attack the Kurdish forces, the Kurdish people, as well as anyone who helps coalition forces" (2 February 2006).

In the city of Mosul, northwest of Kirkuk, where relations between Arabs and Kurds are also tense, roughly 750 Kurdish families fled to other Kurdish villages between July and September 2006 (AP 8 Oct. 2006). In October 2006, a prominent lawyer from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was murdered and nine people were killed in a car bomb attack near the offices of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Mosul (AP 8 Oct. 2006). Media sources report regular violence between Sunni Arabs and Kurds in the city (BBC 27 Oct. 2006; Reuters 19 Oct. 2006).

Turkish and Iranian attacks in northern Iraq

According to media sources, in August 2006, both Turkey and Iran carried out artillery attacks in the northern frontier region of Iraq in order to weaken Kurdish rebel forces, in particular, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (*The Economist* 31 Aug. 2006; *The Guardian* 18 Aug. 2006). According to the United States (US) Department of State, the PKK is a political organization that seeks an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq and parts of Turkey, Syria and Iran (27 Oct. 2006). The PKK is regarded as a "terrorist" organization by the United States (US 27 Oct. 2006; *The Guardian* 18 Aug. 2006), Turkey (ibid.), the European Union (EU) (ibid.) and Canada (Canada 24 Oct. 2006). It is reported that, due to these artillery attacks, groups of Kurds have abandoned roughly six villages in the area (*The Guardian* 18 Aug. 2006). Media sources indicate that intermittent shelling began in April or May 2006 (BBC 30 Apr. 2006; *The Guardian* 18 Aug. 2006).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Human Rights Internet (HRI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), Iraq Updates [London], Kurdish Human Rights Project (KRHP), Kurdish Media [London], Project Ploughshares.

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